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COMMERCIALIZED VICE¹

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TO my mind the most significant fact brought to light by the report of the Chicago Vice Commission is this, that public prostitution is a commercialized business of large proportions, yielding tremendous profits each year, and controlled largely by men and not by women as is commonly supposed.

The yearly profit from this business in Chicago is estimated to be over \$15,000,000. This statement is based upon daily account books kept by keepers of houses of ill-fame, some of them used as exhibits in court cases, and in addition those seized in raids upon such houses by the authorities. It is also based upon the testimony of madams and inmates of houses, on the known profits from the rental of property and from the sale of liquor in houses and saloons where women are permitted to solicit and sell drinks on a twenty or forty per cent commission.

That this estimate of yearly profits is ultra-conservative is seen from the fact that it is based upon the exploitation of only 3194 professional prostitutes, who were actually known to the police or were discovered by the investigators for the Vice Commission.

The recent report of an investigation of the police department in Chicago by the civil service commission declared that the number of professional prostitutes in that city was nearer 20,000 than 5,000 and that 15,000 is a conservative estimate.

The second significant fact brought out by the Chicago report is that this enormous profit goes not only to degenerate and vicious men who make a profession of the exploitation of

¹ Read at the meeting of the Academy of Political Science, April 19, 1912.

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women, but is shared also by ostensibly respectable men and women in the community who rent or lease their property for this business. What is true in Chicago is true in every other large American city where the social vice is tolerated or at least winked at by the public and the authorities.

These facts explain many of the difficulties met with in securing adequate enforcement of state laws and city ordinances in certain municipalities. They explain why efforts to secure the revocation of licenses of disorderly saloons and disreputable hotels are so meager of results. They are at the basis of the demoralization of police discipline. They furnish some of the sinews of war whereby corrupt politicians are elevated to power. With these facts in mind, why do we wonder at the extent of the white-slave traffic, and the difficulty of securing proper punishment, or any punishment at all, for many of those who buy and sell our women and girls?

This profit is the reason for the army of "cadets," political guerrillas, exploiters and scoundrels who live on the earnings of these unfortunate women who are led to think the life easy.

It also accounts for the other commercial interests that support and live upon this evil—the druggists, the fake doctors, the costumers and all those who cater to the trade of the prostitute. She is peculiarly susceptible to all forms of graft; for everything she buys she pays more than a double price in actual dollars.

Whenever an attempt is made to study the social evil and to offer recommendations for its repression we hear the contention from the morally inert that nothing can be done; that this evil "always has existed and always will." We may grant for the moment that a certain proportion of unfortunate women always have drifted and perhaps always will drift into professionally immoral lives through inherited vicious tendencies. But let us have faith enough in womanhood to believe that this percentage is small, and that the great majority—and some hold eighty per cent of the total—take up the life through ignorance, are forced into it against their will or are driven into it by the deception, lust and greed of men. We believe that certain of these conditions can be corrected, and many women and girls of the future saved to society.

Realizing these facts The American Vigilance Association,¹ recently organized, has conceived a program of work which strikes at the root of the problem. The plan of operation is centralized in eight departments, namely:

- Organization and Promotion
- Legislation and Law Enforcement
- International Co-Operation
- Investigation
- Library and Editorial
- Literature
- Education
- Rescue and Protection

As an illustration, through the department of organization and promotion the association desires to interest a large number of citizens and organizations, and to correlate so far as possible the work of philanthropists, educators and reformers.

In time it is planned to have city, state and foreign powers so effectually aroused and coöperating to such an extent that the men exploiters of women and the white slavers will be completely exterminated.

When a town or city desires to join in the campaign against commercialized vice, the association will be prepared to assist it. As a practical program it will recommend, first, a careful survey and study of vice conditions in the city; next, upon the basis of a convincing and reliable report, a campaign to arouse the public conscience to its moral and civic duty; third, the securing of convictions, with the aid of public opinion and by help of lawyers skilled in conducting this particular class of prosecutions; and lastly, so far as is practicable, an educational campaign for the betterment of public and private morals.

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